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Differences in treatment outcome between male alcohol dependent offenders of domestic violence with and without positive drug screens

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Abstract

Men who are violent toward their partners tend to have a dual problem with alcohol and drug use, yet little is known about differences between men with single rather than dual problems. This study was one of the first to evaluate differences between alcohol dependent men who were arrested for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) with and without concurrent illicit drug use. Seventy-eight participants were randomly assigned to manual-guided group behavioral therapies (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Twelve Step Facilitation) and assessed across 12 weeks of treatment. Despite denying drug use at baseline, thirty-two clients (43%) tested positive for illicit drug use (cocaine and marijuana) during the 12 weeks of treatment. The study specifically addressed whether there were differences between clients using alcohol only versus individuals using both alcohol + drugs in terms of 1) baseline characteristics; 2) treatment compliance (e.g., attendance and substance use during treatment; and 3) treatment outcomes (alcohol, drug use, anger management, and aggression at the completion of treatment). The results showed that there were comparatively few differences between the alcohol versus the alcohol + drug using groups at *baseline*. Regarding *treatment compliance and retention*, alcohol + drug using participants attended significantly fewer sessions, had significantly fewer percent days abstinence from alcohol use, significantly more total days of positive breathalyzer results. Regarding *treatment* outcomes across anger management and aggression scores, the alcohol + drug using participants had significantly more impairments in anger management styles from pre- to post-treatment. However, there were no differences between the groups across verbal or physical aggression. Both groups improved in their verbal aggression from pre- to post-

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treatment. The findings suggest that alcohol dependent men who continue to use illicit drugs may require additional interventions to effectively control their drug use and, their anger management styles.

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1. Introduction

High rates of co-occurring alcohol use and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) have been well-established (for a review, Easton & Sinha, 2002; Easton, Swan, & Sinha, 2000; Fals-Stewart & Kennedy, 2005). Recent longitudinal studies suggest that alcohol use may facilitate episodes of physical aggression (Fals-Stewart, 2003). For example Fals-Stewart (2003) collected detailed daily diary data from male partners of IPV who were entering either alcohol or domestic violence treatment programs and found that the odds of severe male-to-female physical aggression were more than 11 times higher on days of men's drinking than on days of no drinking. In a similar diary study assessing the link between illicit drug use and IPV (Fals-Stewart, Birchler, & Kelley, 2003; Fals-Stewart, Golden, Schumacher, 2003), the likelihood of male-to-female physical aggression was significantly higher compared to days of no drug or alcohol use. Moreover, the use of alcohol and cocaine was associated with significant increases in the daily likelihood of male-to-female physical aggression (Fals-Stewart, 2003).

More recently, several studies have pointed to the significance of *combined* alcohol and drug use in precipitating IPV episodes. Survey studies suggest that a large proportion of victims of IPV reported that their partner had been drinking (NCVS BJS, 1998a,b) and using illicit drugs (Miller, 1990; Roberts, 1988) before a violent incident. Although alcohol use has frequently been implicated in IPV, Miller (1990) reported that men who are violent typically use both alcohol and drugs. However, much of the available data are drawn from national survey studies and intake records from prosecutor's offices and hence are often based on retrospective reports from non-standardized assessments.

A literature review by Pennings, Leccese, and deWolff (2002) concluded that the combination of alcohol and drug use can potentiate the tendency towards violent thoughts and threats, which may lead to an increase in violent behaviors. Moreover, concurrent use of alcohol and drug use has been linked to deficits in impulse control, and hence, increases in violent behaviors (Ritz, Kuhar, & George, 1994; Wozniak & Linnoila, 1992). Although the literature reports that concurrent use of alcohol and cocaine is related to violence, other drugs of abuse such as marijuana have also been linked to intentional aggression (for a review, Friedman, Terras, & Glassman, 2003; Hoaken & Stewart, 2003; Niveau & Dang, 2003; Macdonald et al., 2004).

Although rates of co-occurring alcohol abuse and IPV are elevated among men seeking treatment for alcohol related problems (Murphy & O'Farrell, 1996), little is known about differences between men who use alcohol only versus those who use both alcohol and drugs in terms of treatment response based on well controlled clinical trials.

To date, there are few studies that have assessed differences between alcohol only and concurrent alcohol + drug use in terms of randomized clinical trials. In many clinical settings, the dominant current practice is to refer men convicted of IPV to specialty batterer/IPV programs (e.g., the Duluth Model). However, there is little empirical support regarding the effectiveness of these types of programs in reducing violence or substance use (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Babcock & LaTaillade, 2000). Meta-analytic reviews of

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